

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 LA PAZ 05106 01 OF 02 292149Z
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AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
DIA WASHDC
USCINCSO J2 QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 L LA PAZ 5106

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOB, BL
SUBJECT: ELECTION OUTLOOK IN THE HOME STRETCH

1. SUMMARY. WITH LESS THAN TWO WEEKS LEFT BEFORE BOLIVIA'S JULY 9 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, CONTINUITY CANDIDATE JUAN PEREDA APPEARS TO HAVE ACHIEVED A COMFORTABLE LEAD, LEAVING FORMER PRESIDENTS SILES ZUAZO AND PAZ ESTENSSORO TO COMPETE FOR THE CONGRESSIONAL MINORITY. A LA PAZ POLL, HOWEVER, TENDS TO CORROBORATE OUR VIEW THAT A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF BOLIVIA'S VOTING POPULATION REMAINS UNCOMMITTED, AND ELECTION DAY SURPRISES CANNOT BE COUNTED OUT. ALTHOUGH OPPOSITION CANDIDATES HAVE BEGUN TO TURN THE POSSIBILITY OF ELECTION IRREGULARITIES INTO A CAMPAIGN ISSUE, ELECTORAL COURT PRESIDENT MANTILLA BELIEVES THAT THE PROCESS IS EVOLVING ACCEPTABLY AND WILL RESULT IN A LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. WITH LESS THAN 12 DAYS REMAINING, PRO-GOVERNMENT PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE JUAN PEREDA CONTINUES TO BE THE ODDS-ON FAVORITE TO WIN THE JULY 9 ELECTIONS. IN RECENT DAYS, PEREDA HAS BEEN PROCLAIMED

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 LA PAZ 05106 01 OF 02 292149Z

BY VARIOUS CIVIC, PROFESSIONAL AND PEASANT GROUPS IN SANTA CRUZ, ORURO AND COCHABAMBA. ALTHOUGH HE HAS NOT TENDED TO DRAW LARGE OR WILDLY ENTHUSIASTIC CROWDS, HIS PUBLICITY MILL HAS CHURNED OUT VOLUMES OF STORIES AND PHOTOGRAPHS THAT HAVE HELPED CONVEY AN IMPRESSION OF UBIQUITY AND POPULARITY. PEREDA PLANS TO CONCENTRATE HIS FINAL EFFORTS ON LA PAZ AND THE OUTLYING AREAS, WHICH MAY FEEL HE MUST CARRY IF HE IS TO GOVERN EFFECTIVELY AFTER ELECTIONS.

3. A POLL PUBLISHED BY THE CATHOLIC DAILY PRESENCIA ON JUNE 28 SHOWS PEREDA OUT FRONT IN THE CITY OF LA PAZ WITH NEARLY ONE THIRD (33.10 PERCENT) OF THE 1,000 VOTERS SAMPLED FAVORING HIS CANDIDACY. FORMER PRESIDENTS HERNAN SILES ZUAZO AND VICTOR PAZ ESTENSSORO POLLED 19.10 PERCENT AND 6.60 PERCENT, RESPECTIVELY, WHILE THE EXTREME LEFTIST FRI DREW 3.10 PERCENT. UNDECIDEDS (22. QP PERCENT) AND THOSE INCLINED TO VOTE IN BLANK (9.90 PERCENT) COMPRISE THE REMAINING THIRD OF THE SAMPLE. PRESENCIA CONTENTS THAT THE POLL IS REPRESENTATIVE, BUT POINTS OUT THAT "PSYCHOLOGICAL" FACTORS (I.E., THE OBTUSIVE EFFECT OF THE INTERVIEWERS) MAY HAVE DISTORED THE RESULTS SOMEWHAT. IT IS ALSO LIKELY THAT IN LA PAZ, WHERE THE POLL WAS TAKEN, PEREDA AND PAZ ARE WEAKER AND SILES ZUAZO STRONGER, THAN IN THE COUNTRYSIDE. DESPITE ITS PROBABLE DEFECTS, THE POLL TENDS TO CORROBORATE OUR VIEW THAT THE UNDECIDEDS--BOTH IN LA PAZ AND NATIONWIDE--WILL PLAY A KEY ROLE IN DETERMINING THE STRENGTH OF PEREDA'S MANDATE (ASSUMING HE WINS) AND WHETHER SILES OR PAZ WILL PREVAIL IN WHAT APPEARS TO BE THE CONTEST FOR MINORITY SEATS IN THE CONGRESS.

4. AS HIS CAMPAIGN WINDS TO A CLOSE, PAZ ESTENSSORO CONTINUES TO REFRAIN FROM BOMBAST AND DEMAGOGURY, BUT HE HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY PIQUED BY ALLEGED ELECTORAL IRREGULARITIES AND WHAT HE HAS DENOUNCED AS GOVERNMENT-INSPIRED EFFORTS TO DISRUPT HIS CANDIDACY. IN ADDITION TO CLAIMING SEVERAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 LA PAZ 05106 01 OF 02 292149Z

INSTANCES OF SUSPICIOUSLY HIGH VOTER REGISTRATION, PAZ HAS COMPLAINED THAT BLOCKED AIRSTRIPS PREVENTED HIS AIRCRAFT FROM LANDING IN COBIJA, CAPITAL OF PANDO DEPARTMENT, AND IN THE BENI TOWN OF RIBERALTA. PAZ HAS ALSO ACCUSED GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS OF HARSSING HIS SUPPORTERS AND THUS FORCING HIM TO CANCEL A SCHEDULED VISIT TO GUAYARAMERIN, WHICH LIES ON BOLIVIA'S NORTHEASTERN BORDER WITH BRAZIL. PAZ HAS FARED BETTER IN THE COCHABAMBA VALLEY. HE WAS REPORTEDLY PLEASED BY THE ATTENDANCE AT HIS JUNE 23 RALLY IN UCURENA, THE SMALL TOWN WHERE THE HISTORIC AGRARIAN REFORM ACT WAS SIGNED IN 1953. PRIOR TO THE RALLY PAZ IS SAID TO HAVE SOUGHT AND OBTAINED A "GUARANTEE" THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO OBSTRUCT ACCESS TO UCURENA. WE UNDERSTAND PAZ HAD THREATENED TO "CHANGE HIS ATTITUDE" IF THE UCURENA DEMONSTRATION WERE IMPEDED--PRESUMABLY MEANING HE WOULD ADOPT A MORE ANTI-REGIME POLITICAL LINE.

5. SILES ZUAZO HAS ENCOUNTERED EQUALLY STIFF RESISTENCE ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL. A SILES RALLY SCHEDULED TO TAKE PLACE IN URCURENA ON JUNE 15 FAILED TO MATERIALIZE BECAUSE PRO-PEREDA PEASANT GROUPS BLOCKED OFF SURROUNDING ROADS. AN EARLIER RALLY IN TRINIDAD, CAPITAL OF BENI DEPARTMENT, GOT SUCCESSFULLY

UNDERWAY, BUT WAS ULTIMATELY DISRUPTED BY ANTI-SILES DEMONSTRATORS. SILES' BIGGEST CHALLENGE, HOWEVER, WILL PROBABLY BE IN SANTA CRUZ, WHERE HE HAS PLEDGED TO APPEAR ON JULY 1. WHILE PRESIDENT IN 1958, SILES EARNED NOTORIETY THERE FOR HIS USE OF COCHABAMBA VALLEY PEASANTS TO SUPPRESS AN INCIPIENT REGIONAL REVOLT. THE SANTA CRUZ CIVIC COMMITTEE AND THE LOCAL TEACHERS' UNION HAVE COME OUT STRONGLY AGAINST THE SCHEDULED RALLY. THE GOVERNOR OF THE SANTA CRUZ DEPARTMENT HAS TOLD ELECTORAL COURT PRESIDENT JULIO MANTILLA THAT SILES' SAFETY CANNOT BE GUARANTEED, AND INTERIOR MINISTER JIMENEZ GALLO IS QUOTED IN THE JUNE 28 PRESS AS SAYING THAT IF SILES GOES THROUGH WITH HIS PLANS, THERE COULD BE "LAMENTABLE OCCURRENCES." IN AN EFFORT TO MAKE POLITICAL CAPITAL OUT OF SILES' CAMPAIGN DIFFICULTIES, HIS UDP COALITION SENT A
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 LA PAZ 05106 01 OF 02 292149Z

TELEGRAM TO THE OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON JUNE 27 REQUESTING THAT A COMMISSION BE FORMED TO INVESTIGATE BOLIVIA'S ELECTORAL PROCESS, ALLEGED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS DURING THE BANZER ADMINISTRATION, AND THE BACKGROUND OF THE EVENTS THAT OCCURRED IN SANTA CRUZ DURING THE SILES ADMINISTRATION.

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PAGE 01 LA PAZ 05106 02 OF 02 292204Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 LA PAZ 5106

6. WITH THE DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED BY PAZ, SILES AND OTHER OPPOSITION CANDIDATES INCREASINGLY PROCLAIMED IN THE PRESS, ALLEGED ANOMALIES IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS ARE BEGINNING TO ACHIEVE THE STATURE OF A CAMPAIGN ISSUE. A FLURRY OF PROTEST WAS STIRRED RECENTLY WHEN IPE, A WEEKLY NEWSLETTER EDITED BY GONZALO LOPEZ, DISCLOSED THAT BOLIVIA'S TOP MILITARY COMMANDERS HAD SECRETLY ACCORDED AT THEIR APRIL 3-5 EVALUATION MEETING TO "INVIGORATE" THE PEREDA CANDIDACY--A CLEAR BREACH OF THE PUBLICLY-PROFESSED NEUTRALITY. QUESTIONED BY THE PRESS, ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF VICTOR GONZALES CLAIMED TO KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THE SECRET DECISION, SUGGESTING THAT SUCH QUERIES BE REFERRED TO LOPEZ.

7. IN A CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFFS ON JUNE 23, ELECTORAL COURT PRESIDENT MANTILLA REMARKED THAT HE HAD NO "COERCIVE" POWER, AND THEREFORE COULD NOT EFFECTIVELY POLICE THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. HE DID, HOWEVER, HAVE "MORAL" AUTHORITY, AND IF FLAGRANT ABUSES WERE PROVEN, HE WOULD RESIGN. MANTILLA, WHO HAS A REPUTATION FOR HONESTY, SAID HE WAS PLEASED BY HOW THE PROCESS HAD DEVELOPED THUS FAR, AND APPEARED CONFIDENT THAT

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 LA PAZ 05106 02 OF 02 292204Z

ELECTIONS WOULD PRODUCE A LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT. WHAT WORRIED HIM MOST WAS THE POSSIBILITY OF FRAUDULENT VOTER REGISTRATION, WHICH, WITHOUT THE ASSISTANCE OF COMPUTERS, WAS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO DETECT.

8. CONCLUSIONS: WITH SILES AND PAZ COMPETING FOR THE ANTI-GOVERNMENT VOTE, PEREDA APPEARS TO HAVE ACHIEVED A COMFORTABLE LEAD. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, MANY VOTERS REMAIN UNCOMMITTED. THESE AS-YET-UNDECIDED VOTERS WILL DETERMINE WHETHER BANZER GETS AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY ON JULY 9. A NUMBER OF ACTORS--INCLUDING THE POSSIBILITY OF OTHER PRESS STORIES LIKE GONZALO LOPEZ' ON THE MILITARY BACKING PEREDA OR OF VIOLENCE DURING SILES' APPEARANCE IN SANTA CRUZ--COULD HAVE A DECISIVE INFLUENCE ON THESE FENCE-SITTERS, TILTING THE ELECTION RESULTS UNPREDICTABLY.

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